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SERMON

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PREACHED BEFORE THE

UIVERSITY of OXFORD,

IN ST. MARY's CHURCH,

ON ACT SUNDAY, JULY the 11th, 1773.

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WHERE SHALL WISDOM BE FOUND? AND WHERE IS THE PLACE OF UNDERSTANDING?

WISDOM is unqueſtionably the trueſt epitome of human perfection. "It cannot be got-"ten for gold, neither ſhall ſilver be weigh-"ed for the price thereof. It cannot be valued "with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx or "the ſapphire. The gold cannot equal it, and the "exchange of it ſhall not be for jewels of fine gold." Well therefore may we enquire, Where ſhall Wiſdom be found, and where is the place of Underſtanding?

SUCH is it's excellency, that not only thoſe that have attained it, but thoſe alſo, who never will, nor can attain it, make equal pretenſions to it.

THE worldly-minded man applauds his own great Wiſdom and ſagacity, and contemns the Underſtand-

ing of thoſe, on whom he can impoſe in his dealings. The man of pleaſure alſo is wiſe in his own conceit, and ridicules thoſe, who have not the ſame taſte with himſelf. The man of erudition too puts in his claim to Wiſdom.

And if Wiſdom implies the moſt perfect knowledge we can obtain of the Divine Being, and of our relation to him; if it moſt clearly points out to us the glorious works of God in our creation, his providence in our preſervation, and the wonderful diſpenſations of his love and mercy in our redemption; if it acquaints us with the ſocial duties of man to man, and inſtructs us in our own nature, and the due government of ourſelves, the man of erudition can beſt ſupport his pretenſions.

He is able, by a continued chain of reaſoning, with the greateſt accuracy to trace it up to it's Divine Original, and to aſcend to that God, who underſtandeth the way thereof, and who knoweth the place thereof---To him, from whom we receive every good and perfect gift; not indeed in any extraordinary way by ſtronger influences on our ſenſes, than the occaſion may require, or Reaſon and Religion warrant, but in a manner conſiſtent with the natural courſe of things. It is God, who cauſeth the ſeed that is ſown, to be quickened, to riſe up, and to be clothed with the moſt beautiful verdure: but the huſbandman muſt by his own

own induſtry prepare the ground, that is to receive it. In like manner it is GOD, who giveth Wiſdom; but man muſt by proper culture prepare his Underſtanding for the reception of it.

AND that we might not want the means and opportunity of doing this, he hath in an eminent manner diſtinguiſhed our two Univerſities as ſeats of Wiſdom, having directed the inclination and encouraged the pious intentions of their ſeveral Founders and Benefactors, to enrich them with ample endowments, to regulate them by the wiſeſt ſtatutes, and to make them productive of the greateſt advantage both to our religious and civil welfare.

THAT theſe are the important ends, to which the plan of Education, therein eſtabliſhed, conduces, will evidently appear, if we conſider it,

FIRST, with reſpect to the advantage, which thoſe of it's Members, who are intended for civil employments, reap from the religious and learned Education, which theſe places afford.

SECONDLY, with reſpect to the learning neceſſary for thoſe, who are to inſtruct others in the grounds and principles of the Chriſtian Faith.

And firſt, we ſhall find no place, where Youth are trained up with equal improvement; where the abilities, diſpoſition, and rank of each Member are ſo fitly conſidered; where ſo much care is taken, that the Community in general may be benefited, and each Individual may be qualified for the particular ſtation, to which he may be diſpoſed.

Here they are guarded from Luxury and Licentiouſneſs, and removed at a due diſtance from the contagion of ill example, and the baits of ſenſual pleaſure.

Here they are habituated to Study and Devotion, preſerved from Irreligion, Profaneneſs, and Immorality; and ſubjected to rules of Temperance, Sobriety, and Moderation. And that they may not enter into life, ignorant of the ſlippery path they are to tread, and unprepared againſt the difficulties they have to encounter, they are for a proper time placed under the watchful eyes of perſons of mature age, approved conduct, and eſtabliſhed character; whoſe hands are ſtrengthened by laws and diſcipline wiſely calculated to prevent thoſe dangers, to which youth is ſubject from it's inexperience, impetuoſity of temper, and raſhneſs; to counteract the irregularity of paſſion, the averſion to ſtudy, and the impatience of reſtraint, too common at that age.

By the joint efforts of ſuch men as theſe, thoſe who are the ſubjects of their care are inſtructed in every Science, that can adorn them, in their future ſituations of life.

After having ſpent the early part of their youth in acquiring the rudiments of the learned languages, the baſis of univerſal Knowledge, they are taught to uſe them as keys to unlock the ſtores of Science, contained in libraries amply furniſhed with the invaluable Writings of Antiquity; and are admitted to read and converſe with the wiſeſt men of every age and country. It is needleſs to mention, that the employments they are engaged in have a manifeſt tendency to perfect their Nature, and improve their Underſtanding. How conducive are their dialectical and mathematical ſtudies to teach them the right uſe of Reaſon, to inure them to demonſtrative proofs, cloſe attention, and patient meditation? By theſe the ſinews of the mind are braced, it's natural vigour called forth and employed, the judgment rendered clear and determinate in it's deciſions, and they are enabled to detect the fallacies of the Sophiſt, and to defend the cauſe of Truth.

From the contemplation of Nature, and the laws by which this material world is governed, what juſt ideas

ideas are acquired of that Divine Wiſdom by whoſe power they are created!

From Hiſtory, what a fund of knowledge is gained of the laws, cuſtoms, manners, policy, and revolutions of the greateſt ſtates and empires! How ſtrongly does example excite to Virtue, and deter from Vice!

The mind, thus led on by a continual progreſs of freſh objects, is daily enriched with new ideas, and opens into new fields of contemplation.

At this time the foundation of Religion is firmly laid, by thoſe principles of Morality being taught, which ariſe from the nature of things, and which moſt clearly determines the diſtinction betwixt good and evil, the rank we hold in the ſcale of beings, and the duties we owe to ourſelves and others.

He, who is thus fitly prepared, will moſt readily perceive and admit the additional ſtrength and ſupport ariſing from Revelation, which aſſures us of the being of a God, that ſuperintends the univerſe, who hath given a ſanction to the duties of Morality, by making them acts of Religion, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the Goſpel.

WHAT advantages thoſe, who are to expound and teach this Goſpel, will derive from a learned Education, is what we are next to conſider.

ST. Paul, in his Epiſtle to Timothy *, directs that the Man of GOD, that is, the Preacher of the Goſpel, ſhould be perfect, thoroughly furniſhed unto all good works belonging to his office.

IF therefore it is neceſſary for thoſe in general, who require a liberal Education, to give attendance to the ſeveral branches of Literature, in which they are inſtructed, it will in a much higher degree be incumbent on thoſe, who are hereafter to teach others to embrace the means of perfecting themſelves. And it muſt be a pleaſing reflection to ſuch as are engaging in theſe Studies, that the Education of the Gentleman and the Divine thus far go hand in hand. The ſame Sciences, which complete the one, are neceſſary to form the other. The ſame knowledge of the learned languages is expedient to give the latter acceſs to thoſe originals, from whoſe pure and ſacred fountain the Truths of Chriſtianity flow. Profane knowledge muſt be connected with ſacred; and if we would be properly acquainted with the language of Holy Scripture, we muſt firſt be well verſed in the

* 2 Tim. iii. 17.

know -

knowledge of Heathen Writings. Nor will the pains neceſſary for the acquiſition of them be unrewarded. For in them we ſhall meet with accounts of thoſe cuſtoms, and manners, the knowledge of which is neceſſary to illuſtrate and throw a light on many paſſages, which without this help would be veiled in impenetrable obſcurity. Beſides this, if we would adorn and recommend our own Compoſitions, in them we ſhall have the completeſt models of fine Writing; in them we ſhall meet with every thing that is great and ſublime, the moſt noble elevation of thought, the greateſt beauty of expreſſion, and the utmoſt ſtrength of reaſoning. We ſhall find interſperſed in their Writings very excellent obſervations for the conduct of human life, lively conceptions of a Supreme Being, and a ſtrong notion of the ſoul's immortality. We ſhall find Socrates ſo thoroughly perſuaded of this, that he was enabled to face his accuſers with boldneſs and intrepidity, and to glory in death, as it would not only deliver him from the cruel perſecution of his bitter enemies, and the partial deciſions of his unjuſt judges, but aſſign him to that ſtate of immortality he ſo anxiouſly deſired.

HERE we ſhall be ſenſible, that we have purſued Reaſon, 'till ſhe has reached her utmoſt bounds, and, unaſſiſted by Revelation, can proceed no farther.

To

To this point therefore we muſt advance in the preparatory ſtudies of Divinity, as the ground-work of our further progreſs in what more immediately concerns our profeſſion.

HENCE we ſhall with propriety paſs to the proofs of the expediency and neceſſity of a Revelation, from that univerſal darkneſs and ignorance of the true Religion, which had overſpread the gentile world, even at a time, when Reaſon ſeemed to be arrived at it's full ſtrength and perfection, and when ſuch improvements had been made in every branch of literature, as have attracted the admiration of ſucceeding ages.

REASON indeed was alone ſufficient to ſatisfy us, that he, who clothes and adorns the graſs of the field with it's verdant beauty, on whoſe bounty the very worm feeds, and without whoſe knowledge not ſo much as a ſparrow falleth to the ground, would not ſuffer the whole human race to purſue their own deſtruction without manifeſting his will, and directing them how to work out their own ſalvation.

WHAT Reaſon from it's own imperfections was unable to reach, we receive from Scripture. For there we are informed of the frequent Revelations vouchſafed by GOD himſelf to our firſt parents, then to Moſes and the Prophets; and afterwards, when the

fulneſs of time was come, to all mankind by Jeſus Chriſt and his Apoſtles.

It is from Scripture we learn, that no ſooner was man ſenſible that he ſtood in need of Redemption, than God promiſed him a Redeemer. Leſt tradition ſhould be inſufficient to keep alive the memory of this promiſe, we learn, that ſacrifices were ordained, to typify the one future victim, which was to be offered for the ſins of us all. And when by length of time the relation and deſign of this rite became loſt or obſcure, that the promiſe was confirmed anew by the rite of circumciſion, which was injoined to Abraham and his poſterity, as an indelible mark of it's being fulfilled in him.

Our attention will then of courſe be drawn to that particular branch of his family, which was ſingled out by God, as his peculiar favourite, and ſet up as a ſtanding memorial of the promiſe to all ages and nations.

Never ſhall we find in hiſtory ſo remarkable an inſtance of the hand of Providence, in the viciſſitudes and revolutions of ſtates and kingdoms, as in thoſe of the Iſraelites.

From their very firſt riſe and infancy, even to this very time, have they been diſperſed over all lands, and,

and, to uſe the Prophet's ſtrong and lofty expreſſion, ſet up as a beacon on the top of a mountain, and as an enſign on an hill, to publiſh unto all nations that Divine Providence, that ruleth over all, and to prove to the whole world the predictions concerning the Meſſiah.

THE completion of theſe ſeveral predictions are ſo ſtrongly evidenced by the concurrent teſtimony of profane writers, that it renders the ſtudy of thoſe authors abſolutely requiſite.

WHAT Daniel foretold of the four great monarchies of the world, agrees with what has been ſince related by hiſtorians.

WHAT Iſaiah prophecied of Cyrus † by name, more than two hundred years before his prophecy was to be accompliſhed, exactly correſponds with Xenophon's hiſtory of the conqueſts of that great prince.

WHAT Jeremiah foretold of the deſolation and deſtruction of Babylon, perfectly agrees with what is related of that ſiege afterwards by Herodotus ‡.

IT is from hiſtory we learn, that the time of Chriſt's coming into the world was the preciſe time,

† Cyropedia, lib. 7. ‡ Herodotus, lib. 1.

when the whole world was at peace, and when this deſire of all nations was univerſally expected.

To the like teſtimony we may refer for the proof of the facts recorded in the writings of the Apoſtles and Evangeliſts; which muſt have been very early known, as the Goſpels were, all but one at leaſt, firſt publiſhed in Greek, a language at that time the moſt univerſally known.

In this and the Latin tongue the primitive fathers have written; ſome of whom have been juſtly admired throughout all ages, for the clearneſs of their expoſitions, the purity of their ſtyle, and the unaffected ſimplicity of their language.

Unless therefore we are willing to take our Religion upon truſt, we muſt be converſant both with Jewiſh and pagan writers, that we may the more eaſily have recourſe to thoſe originals, which are beſt explained and underſtood, when their connection with profane writers is duly attended to.

Besides, in this enlightened age, in which Learning is become ſo generally diffuſed amongſt every order of men, the knowledge of thoſe, who are to explain and inculcate the Doctrines and Precepts of Religion, muſt be proportionate to the advancement of Literature. For what a reproach would it caſt on us, if, when

when mere pretenders to Learning boldly attack the Articles of our Faith, and make their falſe wit and ridicule the teſt of Truth, we ourſelves, it's profeſſed guardians, ſhould be found too weak to defend it? But this reproach cannot well fall on the Members of a place like this, which by it's care and attention to their improvement has afforded a conſtant ſupply of men of ſound learning and religious education; who have become able expounders, ſenſible defenders, and ſtrenuous advocates, of the Truths of Chriſtianity. To ſuch as theſe we owe the confutation of the inſidious arguments of deiſts, the rejection of the fatal errors of ſuperſtitious bigotry, and the ſuppreſſion of the wild effuſions of ignorance and enthuſiaſm. Even controverſy itſelf, inſtead of being detrimental, having employed the pens of ſuch able men, has been productive of the greateſt advantages to True Religion, and has clearly ſhewn the neceſſity of Learning, to enable us to confute the objections of our adverſaries, and to ſupport and defend the cauſe of Chriſtianity.

It is owing to their not ſetting a due value on the advantages derived from a learned Education, that ſome have prejudiced the cauſe they would appear to ſupport, by pretending to divine inſpiration, ſenſible impulſes of the Spirit, and in ſome caſes even the power of working miracles. But to what purpoſe ſhould theſe gifts be beſtowed on them? What miraculous credentials had the Jewiſh prieſts under the ſecond temple,

temple, or the Scribes and Phariſees, who ſat in Moſes' ſeat? If they are to preach the ſame doctrine that is delivered in the Goſpel, what need is there of inſpiration? And if otherwiſe, how will they avoid the anathema of the Apoſtle, who ſays, though we or an angel from heaven preach any other Goſpel, than that, which we have preached, let him be accurſed. Nor can there be any occaſion miraculouſly to confirm that Goſpel, which hath been for many ages ſo ſtrongly atteſted, and hath ſo firmly maintained itſelf againſt all oppoſition, and ſo clearly proved it's divine authority.

WHATEVER impulſes of the ſpirit the ſelf-conceit and vain-glory of men, who would above meaſure magnify themſelves, may perſuade them they have; if they miſtake a carnal ſecurity for an aſſurance of ſalvation, and the corruptions of nature for the dictates of the ſpirit, they will not only deceive themſelves, but will endanger their own ſalvation by doing deſpite to the Spirit of Grace.

OUR Church does not at this time pretend to, nor does ſhe ſtand in need of, extraordinary gifts, while ſhe is ſupplied from the Univerſities with a regular ſucceſſion of Miniſters, who by their natural and improved abilities, by a ſound and orthodox Learning, and by the bleſſing of GOD on their true zeal and pious endeavours, are enabled to put to ſilence the ignorance of fooliſh

fooliſh men; and who, by clear reaſoning and cloſe argumentation, are qualified to baffle the artful objections and fallacious poſitions of thoſe vain boaſters of their Reaſon and Philoſophy, who require a viſible demonſtration of Faith, which the Apoſtle has declared to be the evidence of things not ſeen; who demand new miracles to confirm the old, and would make their aſſent to divine Truths depend upon their ſenſes, and not upon the veracity of Chriſt and his Apoſtles; who, as St. John aſſerts, boaſt themſelves wiſe, and yet make GOD a liar, by not believing the authority of thoſe Scriptures, which he gave by inſpiration; who value themſelves upon the ſtrength of their reaſon, and yet make uſe of it to dethrone, if poſſible, the Deity, that gave it; who ridicule the myſteries of Religion, becauſe they cannot fully comprehend them, and ſet bounds to the power of the Almighty, becauſe he has limited the power of their Underſtanding.

BUT howſoever ſtrenuouſly theſe or other errors may be ſupported by deſigning men, may we, who are the true ſons of the eſtabliſhed Church, walk worthy of our vocation, and openly manifeſt to all men the ſuperior advantages of real knowledge and erudition, when oppoſed to the fruitleſs attacks of half-bred pretenders to knowledge, who by craft and ſubtilty would undermine our Religion, and annul the Articles of our Faith.

THUS

THUS ſhall we anſwer the pious intentions of thoſe good and wiſe men, by whoſe bounty and munificence we enjoy theſe illuſtrious habitations of Piety and Wiſdom, and that uninterrupted leiſure, which the man of ſtudy and contemplation of all others moſt ſtands in need of. For, as ſaith the ſon of Sirach, (ECCLES. c. xxviii. v. 24.) "The wiſdom of the learned man cometh by opportunity of leiſure." It falleth not to his ſhare, who is confined to the weariſom toil of bodily labour. "How can he get Wiſdom, "that holdeth the plow, and that glorieth in the "goad; that driveth oxen, and is occupied in their "labours, and whoſe talk is of bullocks?" 'Tis not for thoſe, who are chained down to laborious occupations, and whoſe deſire is in the work of "their craft." "All theſe truſt in their hands. Without theſe, 'tis "true, a city cannot be inhabited." They are, doubtleſs, neceſſary and uſeful members of ſociety. "But "they ſhall not be ſought for in public council; they "ſhall not ſit on the judge's ſeat, nor underſtand the "ſentence of judgment, and they ſhall not be found, "where parables are ſpoken." Such honourable ſtations of ſociety ought only to be the portion of thoſe, who have added to the advantages of birth and fortune a religious and learned Education.

How far the character of the Stateſman is heightened by an attention to the principles of Religion, might

might be proved from the example of many who have filled their high ſtations with honour, and have reflected back a luſtre on this ſeat of learning. We ourſelves have ſeen the ſame noble perſon, who by his early piety and ſtudious attention to the duties of this place, gave the moſt happy preſages of the high reputation he has ſince obtained, ſtand forth in the cauſe of Religion; and, ſupported by the ſuffrages and abilities of it's moſt learned advocates, boldly withſtand the pernicious deſigns of thoſe, who would have artfully ſet aſide the articles of our eſtabliſhed Church, and have paved the way for the ſubverſion of real Chriſtianity.

MAY ſuch examples encourage thoſe, who by their Rank and Education are raiſed above the common level, and are to fill the higheſt offices of ſtate, or to plan the laws and defend the liberties of this country, duly to conſider the great importance of adding to their knowledge of letters an intimate acquaintance with the principles of Religion; ſince it is only the happy union of the Chriſtian and the Scholar, that can conſtitute the true character of the great and good man.

As therefore we of this place, through the munificence of our Founders, enjoy the greateſt opportunities of promoting uſeful Knowledge and the practice of Religion, let ſuch bleſſings excite us to diſcharge the reſpective duties incumbent on us with care and diligence.

MAY thoſe, who have reaped the advantages which theſe manſions of true Wiſdom offer, do their utmoſt to ſecure their own reputation and the credit of this Univerſity, by tranſmitting to others the aſſiſtance they have received. May they diſpenſe with fidelity the means of Wiſdom, and promote the deſign for which theſe ſocieties were inſtituted, by inſtilling into youth religious principles, ſound learning, an ardent love for their country, and a conſcientious loyalty to their King.

MAY thoſe, that are bred under their care and culture, be diligent in their ſtudies, obedient to their ſuperiors, regular in their conduct, and at length become the glory and ornament of the ſeveral departments of life that may await them.

MAY all of us in our ſeveral ſtations labour to add Knowledge to Knowledge, and Virtue to Virtue.

IN theſe awful manſions may true Wiſdom be for ever found, and may this continue the place of Underſtanding.

FINIS.